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Report on the joint meetings held between the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council and the bureaux of its functional commissions*

I. Introduction

1. The main objective of the present report is to provide to the Economic and Social Council the results of the joint meetings held between the Bureau of the Council and the bureaux of its functional commissions, as well as some recommendations for improving not only the working methods of the functional commissions but also the coordination and collaboration among them.

2. This series of joint meetings was based on General Assembly resolutions 50/227 and 52/12 B and Council resolutions 1998/46 and 1999/1, concerning the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields, and the consolidated report on the outcomes of the functional commissions of the Council in 1998 contained in document E/1999/3.

3. Section II outlines the main issues that were discussed during the meetings; section III contains the main results of the discussions; and section IV contains some recommendations for improving the work of each commission and improving the coordination and collaboration between the Council and its functional commissions.

II. Main issues discussed

4. The agendas agreed by the Bureau of the Council and the bureau of each commission covered, in general, two wide areas of discussion: on the one hand the working methods of the commission, and on the other hand aspects related to coordination and collaboration both among functional commissions and between the Council and its functional commissions.

5. Under the first area, such issues as the role of the bureau, the periodicity of and time assigned to sessions, inter-sessional meetings, the programme of work, the participation of NGOs, documentation, and outcomes of and reporting of sessions were discussed.

6. Under the second area, such issues as the exchange of information among commissions on cross-cutting issues, the relationship between the functional commissions and the regional commissions, the follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits, and the support that should be provided by the Council to its functional commissions on coordination and collaboration matters were discussed.

7. A list of the joint meetings is contained in the annex.

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III. Main outcomes of the joint meetings

8. The meetings, in which all Bureau and bureaux members showed considerable interest, allowed an open and fruitful dialogue that aimed to highlight achievements and identify shortcomings in the working methods of the functional commissions and coordination among them and with the Council.

9. Regarding the issue of the work of the commissions, the main results of the discussions were:

(a) The reaffirmation of the very important role of the bureau in the performance and outcomes of each functional commission;

(b) Positive experiences were mentioned regarding the election of the bureau both at the beginning and at the end of sessions (Commission on Human Rights for the former and Commission on Sustainable Development for the latter, for example). However, a minimum degree of continuity in the composition of the bureau was highlighted as important for better coordination;

(c) The time assigned to the sessions of the Commissions — one to three weeks — is generally appropriate. However, inter-sessional meetings seem to be necessary in some cases due to the complexity and breadth of the issues discussed by some commissions. Also, two commissions (the Statistical Commission and the Commission on Science and Technology for Development) find the current periodicity and duration of their sessions to be inadequate;

(d) The multi-annual programmes of work adopted by some commissions are important in the planning of future work. However, the work done by other commissions on cross-cutting issues is not always taken into account when the programmes of work are prepared;

(e) The Council's recommendation on the content and format of the reports of the commissions has been taken into consideration by most of the Commissions, which should facilitate the analysis of these reports by the Council. However, the long delay between the moment when a commission adopts its report and the moment when that report is considered by the Council is considered problematic and does not facilitate coordination;

(f) Active participation by NGOs during the sessions of most functional commissions is important. However, there has been a considerable increase in the number of NGOs participating in commissions. Therefore, there is an urgent need to organize this participation in a better way in order to avoid unnecessary time pressure on the intergovernmental debate while taking full advantage of the substantive contribution on NGOs;

(g) The newly reformed Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development is making considerable efforts to integrate issues related to energy and water, but the biennial cycle of its meetings makes it impossible for it to contribute to the 2001 session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which will focus on the issue of energy.

10. Regarding the issue of coordination and collaboration among the functional commissions and with the Council, the main outcomes of the discussions were:

(a) On cross-cutting issues, there is a clear need to avoid duplication of work and collaborate. Although much progress has been made, continued joint efforts are required in all the commissions in that direction. In this context, the exchange of information and reports among commissions that deal with, *inter alia*, gender issues, human rights and social development, is important;

(b) There is also a problem of timing to fulfil the recommendations regarding exchange of information and inputs due to the fact that the sessions of the commissions take place one after the other, and that in some cases there is practically no time between sessions;

(c) There is an evident need for better communication among the bureaux in order to improve the work of each commission. While some commissions have established some degree of dialogue, joint meetings are needed, in some cases on a regular basis. Video-conferences could be used in those cases where the bureaux have different locations.

11. The issue of basic indicators was stressed as an important tool in the follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits. In this context, further analysis by the Council is necessary.

12. In general, organizations of the United Nations system seem to have effectively supported the work of the functional commissions. Nonetheless, the normative work of the commissions could have a greater impact on the operational activities of the United Nations system, as was discussed during the meeting with the bureaux of the funds and programmes.

13. Lastly, an aspect that was emphasized during these meetings was the need to have clear operational guidelines on how to apply many of the recommendations given by the Council to its functional commissions, *inter alia*, to improve the coordination and collaboration among them. The follow-up to these recommendations by the Commissions

is not always an easy task due to their lack of precision and definition. At the same time, the Commissions could become more systematic and effective in discussing the follow-up to the guidance given by the Council.

IV. Some recommendations

A. Methods of work of the functional commissions

14. The Council may wish to:

(a) Reiterate that the bureaux of the functional commissions have an important role in the successful outcomes of the commissions;

(b) Stress that it is important to ensure continuity in the work of the functional commissions, and therefore to ensure a minimum of continuity on their bureaux, and consequently to invite its functional commissions to consider re-electing one member of the outgoing bureau to the incoming bureau, without prejudice to the rules of procedure of the Economic and Social Council regarding the election of the bureau;

(c) Reiterate that the adoption of multi-year thematic programmes for the functional commissions responsible for the follow-up to major conferences can be helpful for ensuring greater collaboration and coordination, and to invite its commissions, while designing their programmes, to take into account the work of other functional commissions and the rest of the United Nations system on cross-cutting issues.

B. Collaboration and coordination among functional commissions and between functional commissions and the Council

15. The Council may wish to:

(a) Request the United Nations Secretariat to ensure that the reports of the functional commissions are issued as soon as possible after the sessions of the commissions, and to recognize that in the case of commissions meeting one after the other, the bureaux and secretariats may need to convey the outcomes of the commissions on cross-cutting issues in advance versions and without awaiting the formal endorsement of the Council;

(b) Decide to review ways to improve the modalities of the participation of non-governmental organizations at the sessions of the Council and its functional commissions, in the context of Council resolution 1996/31 and the rules of procedure of the Council, to invite functional commissions as well as NGOs to contribute to the review of the Council, and to look forward to the overall review by the Committee on non-governmental organizations of the participation of NGOs at United Nations meetings;

(c) Encourage the functional commissions to deepen and enhance their cooperation on cross-cutting issues, and encourage the bureaux to continue to support this cooperation and exchanges of inputs, in particular by implementing fully the guidance given by the Council in its resolutions 1997/61 and 1999/1;

(d) Invite the bureaux of the functional commissions to hold, on a regular basis, bilateral meetings to improve collaboration and coordination on issues that are addressed by two or more commissions, using information technology, as required;

(e) Invite its Bureau to convene a meeting with the chairpersons of all the functional commissions before or during the substantive session of the Council to discuss ways to improve cooperation and collaboration and how the Council can best support these efforts;

(f) Invite its Bureau and secretariat to assist the Council in ensuring that its resolutions and agreed conclusions contain clear guidance on how to operationalize the Council's guidance;

(g) Invite the functional commissions which have not yet done so to include in their agenda an item specifically devoted to follow-up to the guidance of the Council and to coordination and collaboration with other functional commissions.

Annex

Joint meetings

Functional commission	*Date of joint meeting*
Commission for Social Development	17 February 1999
Commission on the Status of Women	3 March 1999
Statistical Commission	4 March 1999
Commission on Narcotic Drugs (video-conference/Vienna)	24 March 1999
Commission on Population and Development	26 March 1999
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development	15 April 1999
Commission on Sustainable Development	27 April 1999
Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (video-conference/Vienna)	3 May 1999
Commission on Human Rights (video-conference/Geneva)	6 May 1999
Commission on Science and Technology for Development (video-conference/Geneva)	21 May 1999